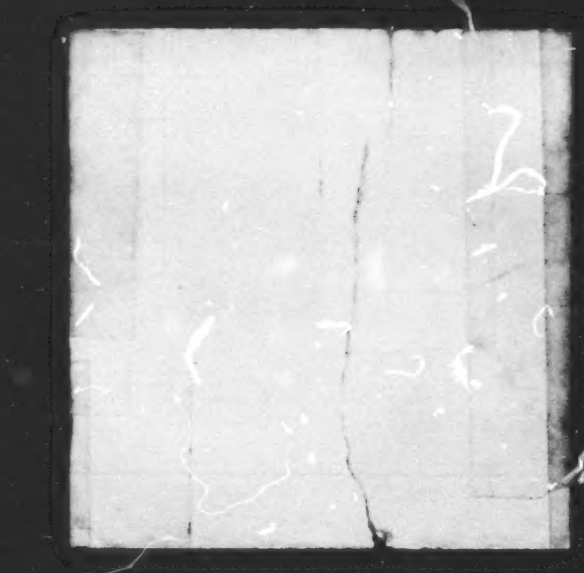

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ABSTRACT

Self-management procedures can be usefully employed in counselor training. A technique for using these procedures in counselor training is described. Student counselors select some aspect of their counseling behavior for modification. The behavior is analyzed, a goal is defined, a strategy is outlined and implemented, and an evaluation is made to determine if the goal has been attained. Strategies for the self-management of counseling behaviors are divided into the categories of self scrutinizing, changing cues, regulating rewards, observing others, and tailoring thoughts. Several benefits are derived when student counselors learn self-management procedures. They go through an intensive review of the counseling process when dealing with their own problems. An opportunity is provided to personally experience some counseling strategy. An interesting aspect of the project is that it encourages the counseling student to learn about N=1 research designs. Two projects that have been completed are described. In one case, the counselor wanted to ask more open questions and fewer closed questions. The second example deals with making more empathic responses. Graphs are presented which illustrate the results of the projects. (Author)

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COUNSELOR TRAINING:
CHANGING COUNSELOR BEHAVIORS
THROUGH SELF-MANAGEMENT

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The subject of self-management is a current topic of interest in education and psychology (Boyd & LaFleur, 1974; Nye, 1973; Thoresen & Mahoney, 1974; Watson & Tharp, 1972; Williams & Long, 1975). The fundamental idea underlying self-management is that an individual with a problem can deal with the problem himself. Outside consultation, such as working with a counselor, is not essential to the process.

This paper, which has three sections, focuses on the concept of applying self-management procedures to the process of teaching counseling skills. Section one is a description of a counselor training technique that employs self-management procedures. Section two discusses the benefits that have been derived from using this technique. Section three describes two self-management projects that have been carried out.

Counselor Training Technique

The counselor training technique focuses initially on some aspect of counseling behavior. Student counselors are asked to listen closely to the audiotapes of their first few counseling practicum interviews and to select some component of their counseling behavior for modification. The modification may come in the form of decreasing or increasing the frequency of a behavior or starting and establishing a behavior that has not occurred previously. Some examples of the type of counseling behaviors that students have selected for modification are as follows:

a) increase the frequency of empathic responses.
b) decrease the use of modifiers for feeling words (e.g., kinda scared, sort of angry, etc.).
c) decrease the frequency of questions.
d) decrease the frequency of closed questions.
e) increase the frequency of open questions.
f) decrease the length of responses.
g) decrease the frequency of references to self.
h) decrease the frequency of interrupting clients.
i) decrease the use of "fillers" (e.g., ahh..., mm..., etc.).

After a behavior has been selected, the students are required to analyze the behavior. An efficient outline for behavior analysis is presented by Thoresen and Mahoney (1974). In this outline, they propose an ABC approach which focuses on the antecedents, the behavior, and the consequences of the behavior. An example of how this analysis can be carried out is illustrated by a student counselor who responds cognitively to clients who are expressing strong feelings.

> Antecedent (A): The client expresses some strong affect in relation to a problem. For example, "I've been searching for a job for two months now and nothing! Things are really getting tight in terms of making it at home."
>
> Behavior (B): The counselor responds to the problem and the related affect with a cognitive question. For example, "Where have you looked for a job?"
>
> Consequence (C): The client responds by listing the places she has looked. The counselor's behavior of asking a content based question has been "reinforced" by the client who responds with a content based answer and avoids the strong feelings of anger and fear that are perceived as threatening by the counselor.

Such an analysis is further strengthened by the collection of baseline data. This data can be collected from audiotapes by a fellow student who is able to discriminate empathic responses.

After the counseling behavior has been analyzed, the student is encouraged to establish a goal. This goal should be stated so that it can be objectively evaluated at some point in time. The following is an example of a goal:

> The counseling student will average at least two empathic responses during the first five minutes of the last four interviews held in the counseling practicum course.

This goal can easily be evaluated at the end of the practicum course.

After a goal has been established, the next step is to determine and implement a strategy for modifying the behavior. The particular strategy that is selected is determined by the counseling student. Most strategies that are

selected fall into the categories of scrutinizing self, changing cues, regulating rewards, observing others, and tailoring thoughts (Elson, 1975). This grouping covers the main approaches to the modification of behavior through learning theory.

Self scrutinizing refers to the systematic observation of one's own behavior. For example, a student counselor listened to five audiotapes of his counseling interviews and counted the number of open questions he asked. The mere procedure of recording the frequency of a desired behavior has often been shown to increase the frequency of the behavior.

Changing cues might better be labeled using cues. Several students who wanted to decrease the use of a particular phrase or filler in their counseling have used a cueing procedure. If a student wanted to decrease the use of "ah", he might write the word on a piece of paper and display it so that the cue can be seen during a counseling session. The cue serves as a reminder not to use the particular word.

Regulating rewards deals with the concept of contingency management. A student counselor might agree that if there were no more than two questions asked in a counseling interview during a randomly selected five minute segment, he would reward himself with a half hour of free reading before going to bed. The contingency is between asking fewer questions and free reading.

Observing others is a phrase to describe the learning process of modeling. When using modeling, a student might systematically listen to or observe taped examples of experts demonstrating their counseling approach. Most major theories of counseling have been modeled on audio or video tape.

Tailoring thoughts deals with the rapidly developing area of covert behavior modification. It is now being shown that behavior modification principles also apply to covert events (Mahoney, 1974). A student counselor who

systematically practices empathic responses by repeating them to himself for five minutes before each interview will probably be more empathic in his interviews.

After a strategy has been selected and implemented, the last step in the self-management project takes place. Students carry out an evaluation of their projects. These evaluations are keyed to the goals that were established earlier. Counseling students are asked to evaluate whether or not the goals were achieved, what they learned about counseling and themselves, and what they would do differently next time.

Benefits Derived from Self-Management Projects

Self-management projects are an efficient learning procedure. Many aspects of the Master's degree counselor training program are synthesized as they are applied in the project.

Most importantly, the self-management project forces the student to apply a behavior change strategy to a real situation. In many cases, the counseling student has limited opportunities to apply newly learned counseling strategies. The self-management project provides a meaningful situation in which to try out strategies and evaluate their effectiveness.

Many counseling students who have completed projects claim that the projects were helpful in terms of emphasizing the basic components of the counseling process. The students had to identify a problem, analyze the problem, determine a goal, establish and implement a strategy, and evaluate the success of the project. Most approaches to counseling emphasize these components if not overtly, at least covertly.

Counseling students have also remarked that the project provided an opportunity to experience personally a behavior change strategy. It is one thing to read about a contingency contract and another thing to experience it in re-

gard to modifying one's own behavior.

Counselors who learn self-management procedures are able to teach their prospective clients the same procedures. Self-management strategies were originally conceived of as an aid by which clients could help themselves without the services of counselors.

A distinctive feature of self-modification projects is the application of practical research skills. Master's degree students in counseling typically take one or two research courses in their programs, but with the decline of the Master's thesis there is often no place to put this learning to use. With the self-modification project, however, the student is provided an opportunity to be involved with an N=1 research experiment. The project requires that the student go through the practical steps of identifying a behavior that can be discriminated, making observations, collecting data, organizing and implementing strategies, and carrying out a data analysis. Most students organize their projects along the lines of applied behavioral analysis designs. Simple projects have employed AB designs whereas more complex projects have used reversal plans such as ABA, ABAC, and ABCA.

Two Examples of Self-Modification Projects

In the last section of the paper, two self-modification projects dealing with counselor behaviors are described. Each of the projects was carried out by a counseling student. On the first day of the counseling practicum course, the supervisor asked that the students listen to the first few tapes of their counseling and then select some aspect of their interview behavior for modification. The students were free to select any counseling behavior they felt needed modification. The two projects described in the paper dealt with open- and close-ended questions and empathic responses.

The first self-modification project was concerned with the types of ques-

tions counselors ask. The student wanted to ask more open-ended questions and fewer close-ended questions. Close-ended questions encourage the client to respond in a specific and short manner. Examples are: "What is the name of your teacher?" "Where do you live?" and "When did you have the discussion?" Open-ended questions encourage more expansive responses on the part of the client. Examples of open-ended questions are: "What happened next?" "Can you tell me about the incident?" and "Can you describe your relationship?"

During the first ten minutes of the first four interviews in practicum, the student was asking one open-ended question for every 3.3 close-ended questions. The student decided that her goal for the project would be to ask one

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Insert Figure 1 About Here

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open-ended question for every close-ended question during the first ten minutes in the last four interviews in practicum.

As a strategy designed to help her reach the goal, she decided that if the ratio of open-ended questions to close-ended questions was greater than 1:3.3 for a given week's interviews, she would reward herself by eating one meal out. During interviews five through seventeen the ratio of open-ended questions to close-ended questions was 1:1.3. Unfortunately, the self-management project results were handed in before she had the last four interviews of the term. The last four interviews came after interview number seventeen. The data showed, however, that she made substantial progress toward the goal of one open-ended question for every close-ended question.

In the second project, the student attempted to increase the frequency of empathic responses and decrease the frequency of non-empathic questions during the first three minutes of her interviews. A non-empathic question

was defined as any question the counselor asked that did not deal with feelings.

Insert Figure 2 About Here

During the baseline period (interviews one through four), the student averaged one empathic response for each 16 non-empathic questions. She decided that her goal would be to change this ratio of 1:16 to 3:2 for interviews five through eight and to 5:1 for interviews nine through twelve. During interviews five through eight, she incorporated a treatment plan that involved brainstorming feeling words with pencil and paper for ten minutes the night before scheduled interviews. After the brainstorming session, she also practiced verbalizing empathic responses for an additional five minutes. This treatment was terminated after interview number eight.

During interviews five through eight, she had a ratio of 18 empathic responses to 17 non-empathic questions. This ratio did not meet her goal of 3:2. It appears she would have achieved the goal had it not been for the many non-empathic questions she asked in interview five. In the reversal phase (interviews nine through twelve), her ratio of empathic responses to non-empathic questions was 5:8 which again did not meet her goal of 5:1. The student indicated that she was disappointed in not achieving her goals, but that she did feel she was making definite improvement in empathy skills.

Summary

Self-management procedures offer an interesting and efficient means for teaching counseling skills. Specific counseling behaviors are identified, analyzed, and modified by the students themselves. Students learn what it is like to systematically modify their own behavior and also how to teach others to do the same. Possibly the strongest feature of this procedure is its built

in emphasis on the need for modifying counselor behaviors. With many new and rapidly developing counseling methods, it is incumbent upon successful counselors to be open and ready to adopt new skills.

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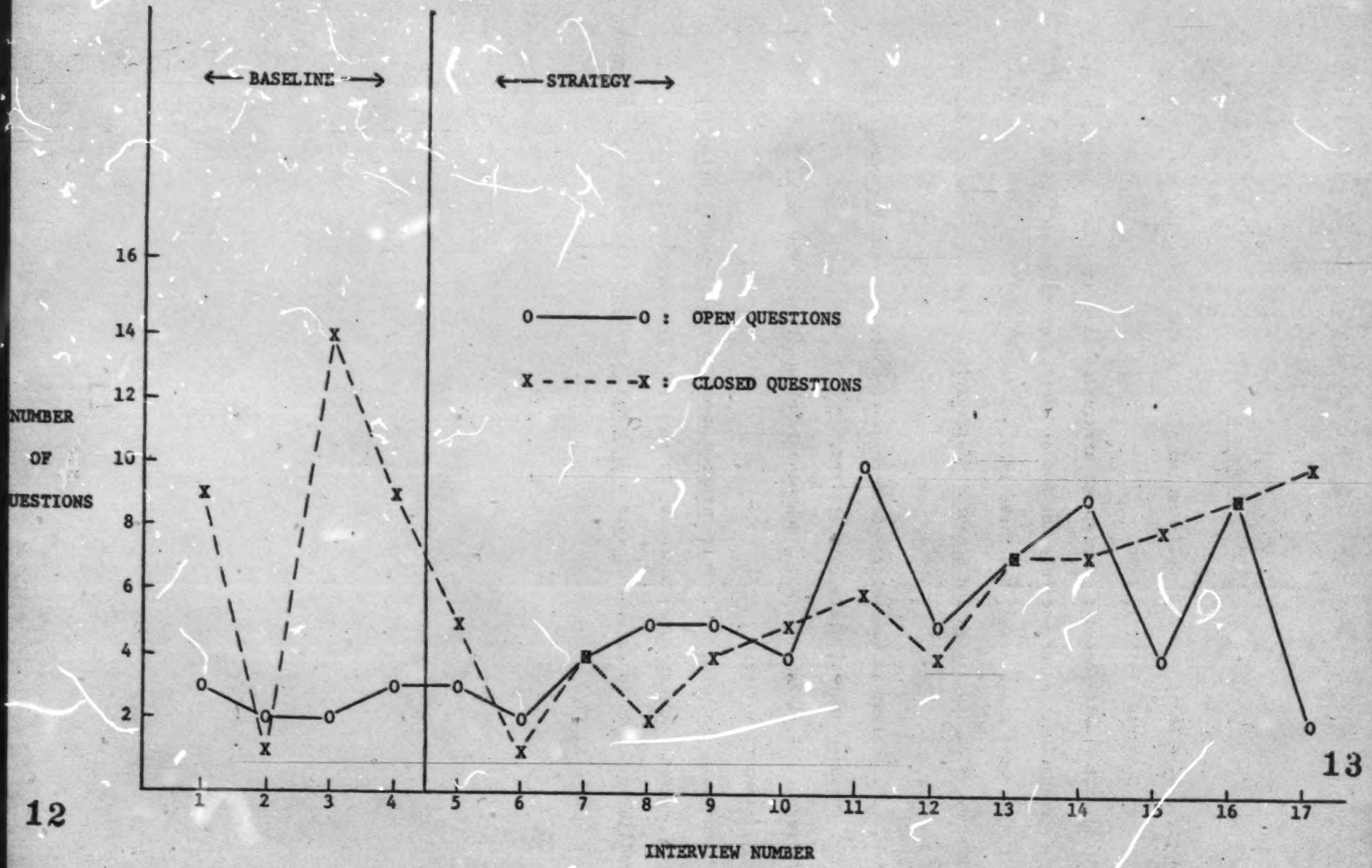

Figure 1. Number of open and closed questions asked by counselor during first ten minutes of interviews.

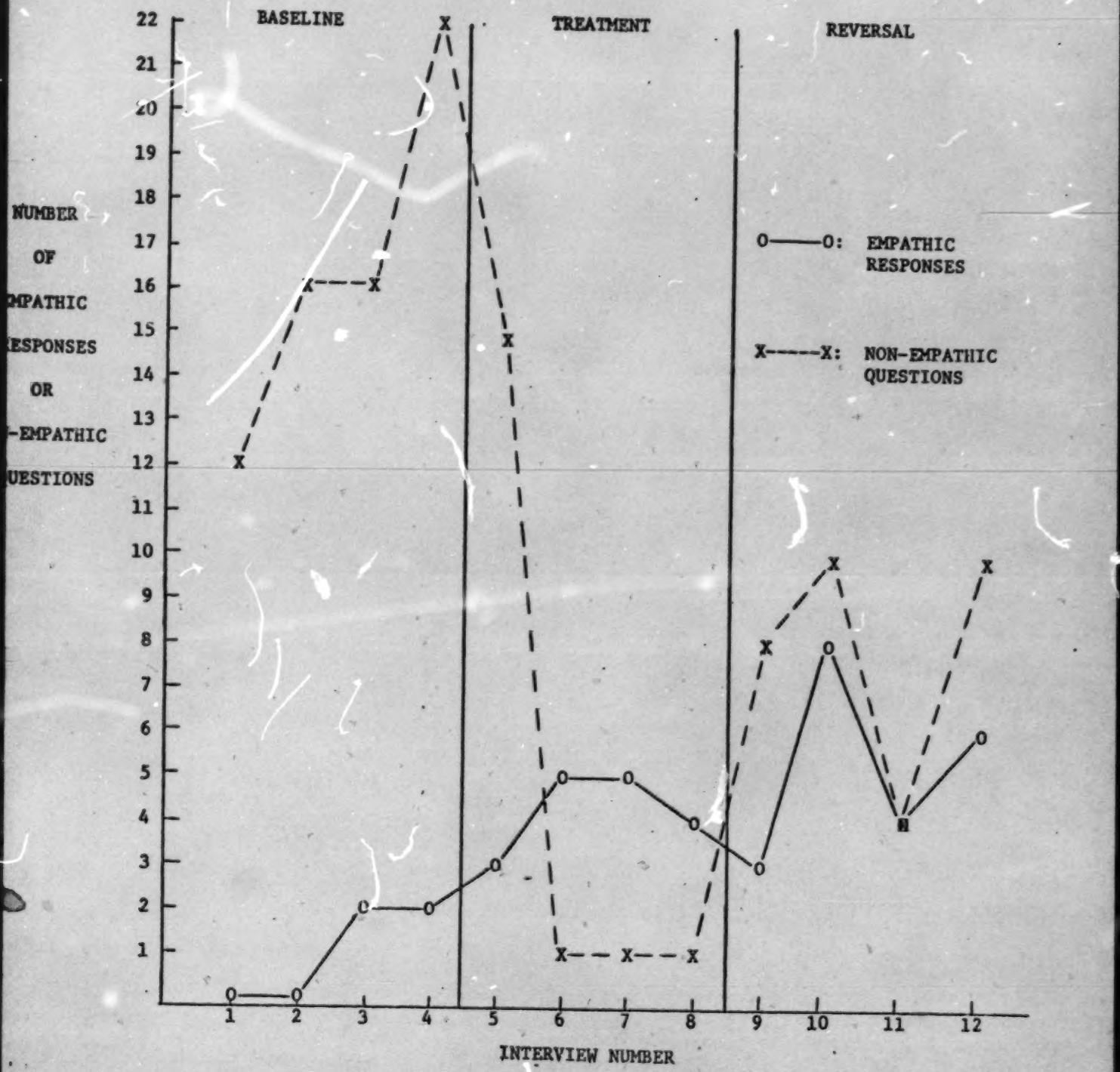

Figure 2. Number of counselor empathic responses and non-empathic questions during first three minutes of interviews.